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AMERICAN MURAL PAINTING.



JOHN S. SARGENT.

THE DOGMA OF THE REDEMPTION.

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The art of mural painting, which was discussed in the last number, has been most effectively practised in this country, although it is less than thirty years ago when the first attempt was made to embellish interior walls with decorative design.

It is true that many architects do not look with favor on mural painting. As one expressed it the other day, "We have been fooled so often with abortive paintings that we prefer tinted walls." Hence we find that the architectural plans are rarely constructed with mural decoration specifically in view. The architects of churches, public buildings and large private mansions are, however, becoming alive to the beauty of wall decoration to enhance the constructive beauty of the building.

John La Farge, the foremost of decorative painters to-day, was also the first. The building of Trinity Church in Boston was the opportunity by which the dignity and importance of mural decoration was introduced. The work of La Farge in this building, later in St. Thomas' Church, New York, and his masterpiece, "The Ascension of Our Lord"—which may well be considered the greatest piece of mural painting in this country—has been the inspiration of those that have followed. The charm of his work is the simplicity of his composition, the ease wherewith he carries his color and design into harmonious union, the flowing line of his draperies, which can only be compared with those of the great Italian classics.

The next opportunity for a large mural painting came with the building of the Capitol at Albany, N. Y.

Let me, however, digress a moment to explain how a mural painting is produced. The plastered wall is covered with a coating of hard oil or varnish, the back of the canvas on which the painting is to be made receives a coating of shellac, which prevents moisture or mildew to come through; a thin layer of white lead is then put on the prepared wall with a trowel and the painted canvas is carefully rolled into it. A perfectly smooth surface is then presented.

William Morris Hunt, who had been selected to make two large mural paintings for the Assembly Chamber, each to be fif-

teen by forty feet in size, chose, however, to work directly on the wall, with the result that through the cracking of the plaster and the settling of the building his great work has been destroyed. "The Flight of the Night" and "The Discoverer" are, thereby, among the lost treasures of art.

The Boston Public Library was conceived in all the breadth and fullness of a beautiful ideal. The work there of Puvis de Chavannes must be seen to be appreciated. In John Sargent's painting the pictorial somewhat overbalances the decorative, but "The Triumph of Religion," of which the famous frieze of "The Prophets" is the most popular detail, is a triumph of art. "The Quest of the Holy Grail," by Edwin A. Abbey, has been described and illustrated in a sumptuous volume issued by Curtis and Cameron of Boston, with an ably written text by Ferris Greenslet, Ph.D., interpreting the legends on which this decoration is founded.

The Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 brought out the talents of many men and developed the art of mural painting still further. Francis D. Millet had charge of the mural decorations. He selected men who had already done such work, like George W. Maynard and E. H. Blashfield. The others most successfully essayed the grand task. The memory is still fresh with the beauty of the work these men accomplished in the *Vanishing White City*. The Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building held work of J. Alden Weir, E. H. Blashfield, George W. Maynard, Robert Reid, Charles S. Reinhart, Carroll Beckwith, Edward Simmons, Kenyon Cox, Gari Melchers, W. de Leftwitch Dodge, Walter McEwen, Walter Shirlaw and Laurence C. Earle. The Agricultural Building had George W. Maynard's paintings, while W. de L. Dodge decorated the dome of the Administration Building, symbolizing "The Glorification of the Arts and Sciences."

Other work had been done in different parts of the country. There is the Sculpture Hall of the Walker Art Building at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine. Four large tympanums by John La Farge, Abbott H. Thayer, Elihu Vedder and Kenyon Cox give noble conceptions. Francis Lathrop had decorated the Metropolitan Opera House; Edwin A. Abbey painted "The Bowling Green" in the Imperial Hotel Café, where Thomas W. Dewing painted the ceiling with an allegory of "Night, Day and Dawn," three beautifully draped female figures, gracefully floating in a pale blue sky among soft, mel-low clouds. George W. Maynard painted the decorations of the Hotel Ponce de Leon at St. Augustine, Florida, and figures in the Plaza Hotel, New York.

The late Robert Blum finished in 1895 his masterwork in the two large friezes, fifty feet long by twelve feet high, in the concert hall of the Mendelssohn Glee Club of New York. He selected "The Moods of Music" and "A Vintage Festival." Nothing is more absolutely decorative and fulfils the conditions of its environment more strictly than this.

The Appellate Courts Building on Madison Square, New York, is a fit example of the service of the art to elevating beauty. There are paintings which cannot be rivaled. H. Siddons Mowbray's "The Transmission of the Law," has drawing of the utmost delicacy and figures of exquisitely refined types. Willard L. Metcalf shows his dramatic and realistic tendencies in a frieze, which balances one painted by Robert Reid. The court room contains three magnificent panels by Edward Simmons, Edwin H. Blashfield and Henry Oliver Walker on "The Power," "The Justice," and "The Wisdom of the Law." These paintings have elevated sentiment, poetic feeling and individual charm. It is to be noted also that this building shows the decorative uses of the plastic art by its adornment with fine sculptured groups and figures by Daniel Chester French, Philip Martiny, J. Scott Hartley, Herbert Adams and others.

The monument for American mural painting is, however, the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., where the wealth of decoration makes it one of the most remarkable and interesting

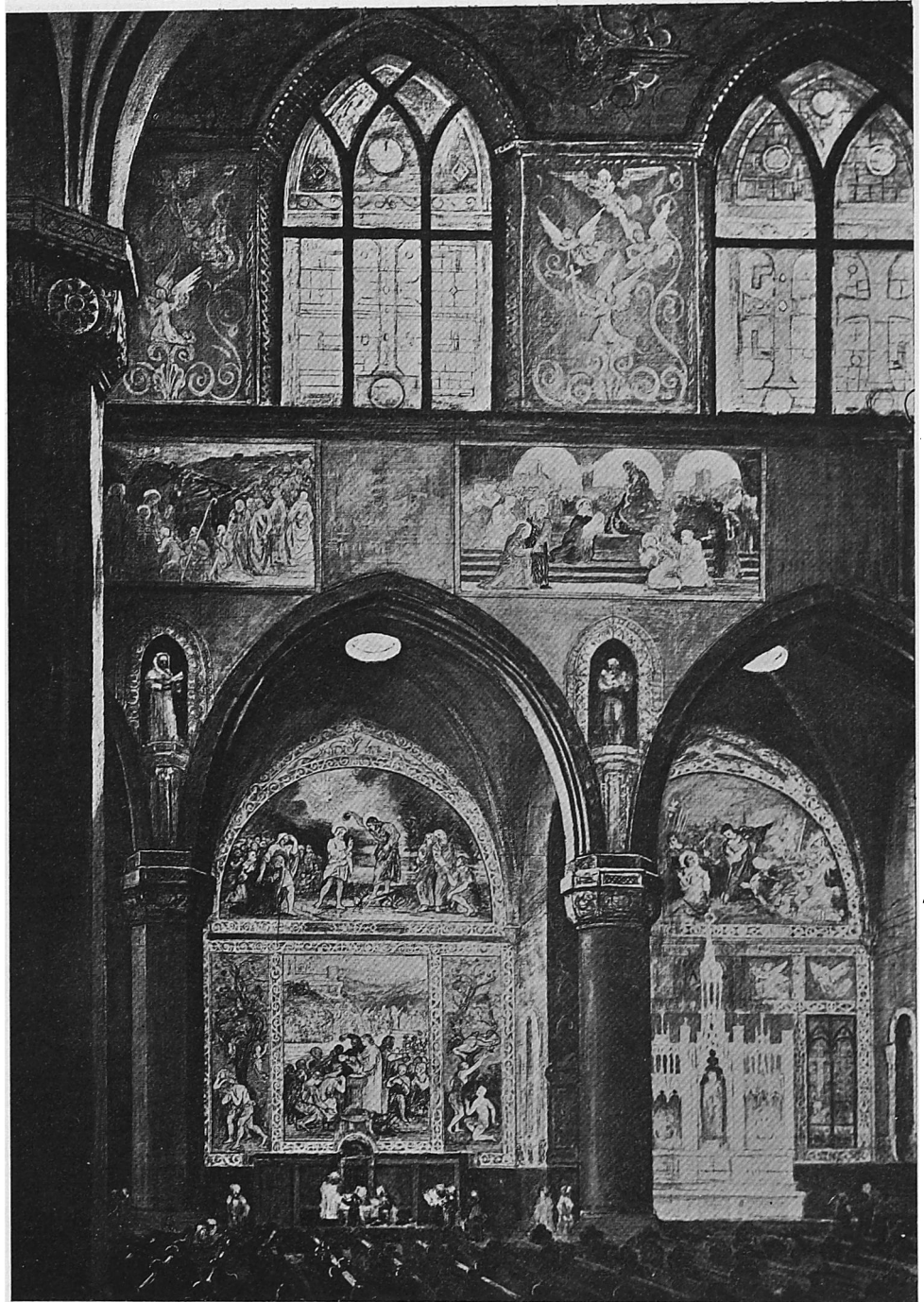
interiors in this country. The broad and vigorous style of John W. Alexander is seen in his series of paintings on "The Evolution of the Book." H. O. Walker shows his sincerity and refinement in his group of pictures which go under the general title of "Lyric Poetry." Walter McEwen gives the stories of Greek heroes admirably, while E. H. Blashfield depicts "The Evolution of Civilization." Walter Shirlaw's designs of the "Sciences," in their large sweeping lines and highly developed forms, are powerful and sculptural. The work of Charles Sprague Pearce, Robert Reid, George Barse, Jr., Frank Benson, Edward Simmons, the Pompeian style of George W. Maynard's figures, the grandeur and mystery of Elihu Vedder's creations—it all compels admiration.

It is not my intention to give a detailed account of all mural painting in this country. For this I would refer to that admirable book written by Pauline King, entitled "American Mural Painting," which bears the imprint of Noyes, Platt & Company, of Boston. I will, however, enumerate a few more important decorations. Mr. E. H. Blashfield, perhaps, has executed more commissions than any. Notable among his work is the lunette in the Senate Chamber of the Minnesota State Capitol, representing "Minnesota as the Granary of the World," his decorations in the residences of Collis P. Huntington, Adolph Lewisohn, George W. Drexel, W. K. Vanderbilt, and in the directors' room of the Prudential Building of Newark, N. J. Frederic Crowninshield and Will H. Low decorated in the Waldorf-Astoria, and C. Y. Turner in the Hotel Manhattan. Francis D. Millet painted most successfully for a Pittsburgh bank a panel, entitled "Thesmaphoria," in which the portraits of noted opera singers appear. The beautiful frieze in the reception hall of Mr. George J. Gould's Georgian Court at Lakewood, N. J., was painted by Robert V. V. Sewell, and shows "The Canterbury Pilgrims."

Several other mural painters may be mentioned whose work has the stamp of beautiful creation, with dignity and charm. They are Albert Herter, William B. Van Ingen, Joseph R. De Camp, Luis F. Mora, Douglas Volk, Taber Sears, Arthur R. Willet and others.

Related to this subject is the work of William Fosdick in incised line painting. This is a modern rendering, with modern means, of an ancient art. The drawing of the picture is burnt into the wooden wall covering with hot metal pencils. It is then carved, tooled, painted and glazed, and becomes a striking example of effective mural decoration. An excellent example of this work may be seen in St. John's Episcopal Church, Montclair, N. J., where the well-known art patron, William T. Evans, has presented a fine example of Mr. Fosdick's art.

In the accompanying illustration may be found an example of the perfection to which interior decoration and mural painting may be brought. It is a sketch of the design made by Mr. W. Laurel Harris for the walls of the Church of the Paulist Fathers in New York. This church was the first of the Roman



DESIGN FOR MURAL DECORATIONS IN THE CHURCH OF THE PAULIST FATHERS.
BY W. L. HARRIS.

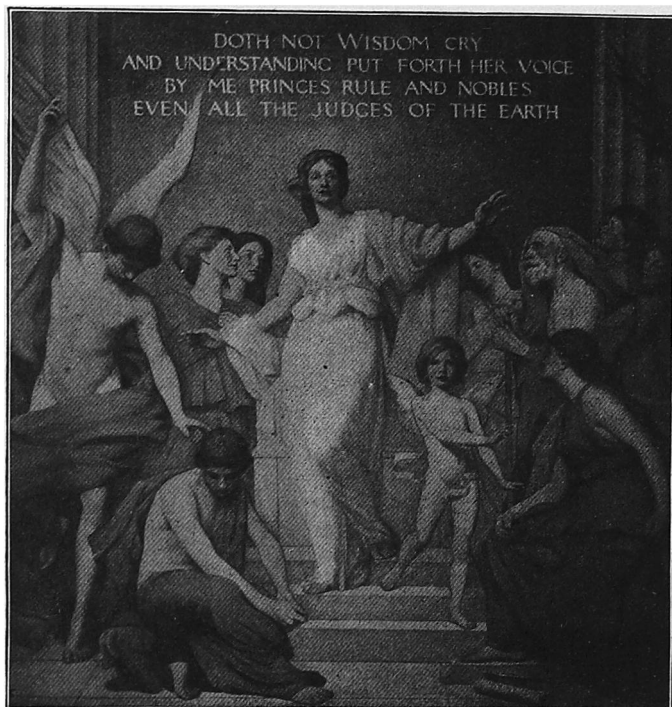
Catholic churches in this country to carry out a scheme of decoration in accordance with its original plan to employ symbolism to teach doctrine, or, as an act of the second Council of Nicea declared: "The Word fixed upon the wall will remain, teaching us the Gospel morning, noon and evening."

The entire church is now being decorated in a harmonious scheme with the central thought to teach the continuity of divine revelation, leading up towards the sanctuary, which has been decorated by John La Farge. Two of his figures, "The Angel of the Sun" and "The Angel of the Moon," are spots that are pleasant, indeed, full of loveliness and of mystery, in as much as the spectator feels that beyond what he sees are more riches than he can but dimly descry or divine.

The union and harmony of the scheme for this church dec-

oration is especially commendable. The "Church of the Ascension," with its stained glass windows, that cry out against each other in unharmonious color, is an example of the incongruity which sometimes arises when different artists, without mutual agreement, design the decorations. Here we find that Mr. Harris, with a wonderful broad grasp, has handled a gigantic work in a masterly manner.

The Art of Mural Painting in this country has a constantly widening field for the exercise of the talents of our figure painters and decorators.



H. O. WALKER.

THE WISDOM OF THE LAW.

Copyright, 1899, by
H. O. Walker.
From a Copley print,
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Curtis & Cameron, Boston.

At the annual dinner of the Municipal Art Society of New York, Frederick Crowninshield, president of the Fine Arts Association, said, among other things: "As we crawl up the city the horrors increase. What is the new public library? A boy's model in the bottom of a teacup. The library itself is fine, but the surroundings are bad."

That is hardly fair criticism. The new public library will be an architectural monument of which the city may well be proud. Its location is the only one as well as the best one available. Standing back a hundred feet from the Fifth avenue curb it will present an imposing appearance, when the wide streets on either side are taken in consideration. Its view from Bryant Park at the other side cannot be improved upon. The unsightly store fronts on 42nd street are gradually being changed whereby the surroundings will be improved.

Such a site in the heart of the city—where a public library should be built to serve its purpose—was a fortunate selection. The only improvement for advantageous surroundings could have been by selecting a site in Central Park or Van Cortlandt Park. Nobody would have wanted the building in either place. Mr. Crowninshield's criticism is small faultfinding and unworthy of him.



THE COLLECTION OF MR. A. O. DESHONG OF CHESTER, PENN.

Standing on an eminence in the centre of an entire city block in Chester, Penn., is an old colonial mansion, surrounded by hundreds of rare specimens of arboriculture. The owner, Mr. A. O. Deshong, greets you with the utmost cordiality. He is a fine example of the cultured gentleman, his character and manner bearing evidence of that mellow influence which art exercises over her true lovers. In outward appearance he could readily be taken for Meissonier—the resemblance is most striking. In stature small, he is large in his ideas and broad minded, and no collector is more highly respected for his taste in selection. For forty years, no matter how much he might be engrossed in his business as owner of the famous Chester stone quarries, he would go every week to New York and devote one or two days to search for those things which his artistic desires craved. The result has been a collection of oriental wares of the finest and rarest specimens, while his pictures were chosen, not for the names they bore, but for the quality of excellence in their kind which they possessed.

Among his bronzes are found two large vases which were once in the Mary Jane Morgan collection. They are in the finest style of Japanese art, twenty years having been devoted to their production. In all there are some fifty bronzes, every one having some extraordinary merit.

About twenty ivories are displayed in suitable cabinets. The most perfect of these is the hollow section of a tusk, twenty-four inches high and eight inches in diameter, upon which is carved a winged dragon in the clouds. The texture of the ivory is exceedingly soft and the design and workmanship simplicity itself.

A number of specimens of Japanese lacquers are of extraordinary beauty and rarity, while the collection is very profuse in Chinese cinabar lacquer, some specimens of this carving being matchless outside of the collection of the Chinese Emperor.

In carved minerals, such as amethyst, topaz, crystal, agate, jade, lapis lazuli, malachite, the collection bids fair to rival that of the late Heber R. Bishop. Notably among these are a few specimens in amber, exceedingly rare. The Chinese procured most of this mineral from the Baltic on their caravan routes of ancient times. Of this Baltic amber there is one carving in particular which is the finest specimen known. It is designed in the form of a lotus flower, with leaves and branches, and is exquisitely delicate. Among the strange and unusual objects is a rhinoceros horn, wonderfully carved in the form of an elephant's head.

The paintings fill the walls of two entire floors of the house. They are of special interest in the fact that Mr. Deshong preferred the best example of a minor master to a poor or average canvas of a man with a great name. As the gathering of this collection extends over a period of forty years, it is not surprising that many names of artists which have lost their lustre are found here. But the loss of reputation or fashionable acclaim cannot be ascribed to their examples found here. I will enumerate a few of the pictures.

There is a landscape by Alexander Calame, whose Swiss scenery has always been popular. The genre work of Felix Schlesinger is shown in "The Children's Party at the Convent;" it is full of life and color and is free of the Munich school drawbacks of the artist. The late S. P. Avery, the noted art expert, considered the Gaetano Chievici, "The Hasty Pud-